

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 671

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

February 16, 1942

LINCOLN BOOK OF THE YEAR—1941

The Lincoln Foundation Advisory Group comprising nineteen of the outstanding Lincoln students of America has submitted its report on the Lincoln Book of the Year, and has chosen *Reveille in Washington* by Margaret Leech for this recognition. The book named as Highly Commendable is a compilation of daily episodes occurring in the life of Lincoln, entitled, *Lincoln, 1809-1839* by Dr. Harry Pratt. (See Lincoln Lore No. 635).

The little town of New Salem, Illinois where Abraham Lincoln first established a residence has been rebuilt and its history preserved in a book by Benjamin P. Thomas entitled, *Lincoln and New Salem*. Springfield, the capital city of Illinois, is visualized and the Lincolns and their neighbors made to live again by Paul Angle in his book *Here I Have Lived*. Now comes Margaret Leech to orient the Lincolns in the nation's capitol where they resided from 1861 to 1865.

Reveille in Washington is a remarkable contribution to Lincolniana. It is a beautifully told, realistic story of the city of Washington covering those years when the Lincoln family occupied the White House as the first family of the land, and this issue of *Lincoln Lore* will be chiefly occupied in discussing how completely the Lincoln theme dominates the text.

Even before one opens the book he is convinced that this is to be a story of the Lincolns, because the information on the dust jackets releases this statement which takes up one quarter of the complete subject matter of the condensed synopsis: "The book describes the life in the White House, and the struggle of Mary Lincoln, a proud and wretched woman in an unfriendly community. This was the house where for four momentous years Lincoln lived; these were the streets in which he walked, the soldiers he reviewed, the receptions at which he interminably shook the people's hands. Here he was despised before he was honored, here he was plotted against and murdered."

The story approaches the atmosphere of an historical novel with Abraham Lincoln as the outstanding character. The preliminary pages prepare for his coming to Washington with a description of the closing days of James Buchanan's administration and the declining years of the general in chief, Winfield Scott.

The action in the story really begins in the third chapter with "The Arrival of a Westerner," although the author does not fail to emphasize the President's secret approach to the city of Washington previous to his inauguration, it is difficult to discover in her narrative any statement which would allow the Reader's Digest (December 1941, pp. 144) to state in its condensation of the book that "He was spirited aboard the night train to Washington at Harrisburg on a stretcher."

Inasmuch as the stretcher story appears in the opening paragraph of the Digest condensation it does not speak well for the accuracy of the reviewer, who places Lincoln in a still more humiliating position than history has accorded him. The fact that the Reader's Digest does open its condensation with the story about Lincoln's en-

trance to Washington, contributes something to the conclusion that Lincoln is considered the moving figure of the book.

Opening the book at about the middle of the story one finds the chapter caption "Black, Copper and Bright." That the contents has something to do with emancipation is clearly implied. The immediate preliminaries to the proclamation, its signing by the President, the comments on Lincoln's attitude towards slavery, and the preservation of the Union are all in accord with the available facts about this most important instrument of democracy, rivaled only by the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution itself.

The "Madam President" chapter is so much more appreciative of Mary Lincoln than most of the sketches about her, that one may overlook the absence of a frank and factual statement about the mental condition of the President's wife which was largely responsible for many of the strange episodes in which she engaged. The conclusion of the chapter mentioning the Mrs. Ord incident would have been more understandable if the deep humiliation which Mrs. Lincoln suffered on this trip had been made known.

The assassination of Abraham Lincoln rather than the close of the Civil War is easily the climax of the book and much space is not only given to the event itself, but also the trial of the assassins is emphasized.

Possibly it is in the various sections of the book which utilized more than sixty pages of the concluding part of the work which makes clear that the chief emphasis is on the Lincoln family. The different sections consist of an appendix, chronological table, bibliography, biographical notes and an index.

The appendix is confined exclusively to data relating to bills for services and commodities furnished at the time of Lincoln's death and funeral. The chronological table containing a summary of the chief events occurring during the five year period has forty-two incidents relating to Lincoln. The index uses 284 direct page references to Lincoln in a book which numbers but 419 pages of text. The bibliography notes sixty-four different exclusively Lincoln books which were used by the author as sources.

The genealogical section of the book, comprising twenty-eight pages, offers the best evidence that Abraham Lincoln is the central figure in the argument. One hundred leading persons in the book have received attention here, in fact every one of the important characters, except Lincoln. His name is so continually before the reader throughout the text that it would be superfluous to include a personal sketch in the genealogical section. It is of interest to note that the President's wife, Mary Lincoln, is given more space than any one else mentioned in the biographical notes, and Robert Lincoln, the President's son, demands as much space as General Grant, the person receiving the fullest notation outside the Lincoln family.

Reveille in Washington is not only a book of interest to the general reader, but invaluable to the student of Lincolniana.